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Message Text

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73
ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 NEA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03

INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03

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P R 121840Z MAR 74
FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 148
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AMEMBASSY ATHENS
AMEMBASSY BONN
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AMEMBASSY OSLO
AMEMBASSY OTTAWA
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY REYKJAVIK
AMEMBASSY ROME
AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE
USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS
USNMR SHAPE
USCINCEUR

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TAGS: PFOR, PINT, XT, BE
SUBJECT: BELGIAN PRESS INTERPRETS THE ELECTION

REF: BRUSSELS 1487

1. SUMMARY. BELGIAN PRESS POLITICAL ANALYSTS AND EDITORIAL WRITERS WERE GENERALLY RELIEVED THAT THE STEADY GROWTH OF MILITANT LINGUISTIC PARTIES WAS CHECKED IN THE MARCH 10 ELECTIONS AND AGREE THAT THE SETBACK THESE PARTIES SUSTAINED MAKES THEM HIGHLY
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DOUBTFUL CANDIDATES FOR PARTICIPATION IN A NEW GOVERNMENT.

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SEVERAL SOCIALIST PAPERS CONTEND THAT REGIONALIZATION, WHICH THE LINGUISTIC PARTIES WERE THE FIRST TO CHAMPION, IS NO LONGER THE MOST IMPORTANT PROBLEM IN BELGIAN POLITICS OR A KEY FACTOR IN CONSTITUTING A NEW COALITION. PRESS COMMENTATORS EXPECT A NEW COALITION TO BE COMPRISED OF THE SOCIAL CHRISTIAN AND SOCIALIST PARTIES, MOST CONSIDER IT PROBABLE THAT THE GOVERNMENT WILL BE LED BY THE SOCIAL CHRISTIANS WITH LEO TINDEMANS AS PRIME MINISTER. FEW BELIEVE THE LIBERALS WILL BE INCLUDED BUT NEITHER DO THEY EXCLUDE THE POSSIBILITY OF A NEW THREE-
PARTY GOVERNMENT EMERGING. ONLY FRANCOPHONE SOCIALIST PAPERS SEE ANY BASIS IN THE ELECTION RESULTS FOR INCORPORATING IN A NEW GOVERNMENT PROGRAM MAJOR ELEMENTS OF THE SOCIALIST ELECTION PROGRAM, WHICH WAS BILLED AS A "TURN TO THE LEFT". NONE HAVE MENTIONED ANY IMPLICATIONS OF THE ELECTIONS FOR BELGIUM'S INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS. COMMENTS FROM SOME IMPORTANT PAPERS FOLLOW.

2. MANU RUYS, RESPECTED EDITOR OF CONSERVATIVE SOCIAL CHRISTIAN "DE STANDAARD," WROTE THAT THE ELECTION ARRESTED TWO TRENDS PREVIOUSLY ACCEPTED AS CONSTANTS IN BELGIAN POLITICS; THE DECLINE OF THE SOCIAL CHRISTIANS AND THE PROGRESS OF THE LINGUISTIC PARTIES. THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AFFECT WILL BE TREMENDOUS, AND THE BLOCKED EXPANSION OF THE FDF IN BRUSSELS WILL HAVE A GREATER IMPACT THAT THE LOS OF ONE FDF SEAT MIGHT INDICATE. STILL, IT WOULD BE ERRONEOUS TO BELIEVE THAT LINGUISTIC PROBLEMS PLAYED A LESS IMPORTANT ROLE IN THE 1974 ELECTIONS; ALL BRANCHES OF THE TRADITIONAL PARTIES WITH PRO-FEDERALISTIC STANDS GAINED.

3. RUYS SAID THAT WORKERS IN FLANDERS REJECTED THE SOCLIALISM ESPOUSED BY THE SOCIALIST PARTY. ALTHOUGH THE SOCIALISTS IMPROVED THEIR POSITION IN WALLONIA, LEFT-WING RADICALISM THERE WAS WEAKENED BY THE LARGER GAINS OF THE SOCIAL CHRISTIANS. THIS WILL PROBABLY PUSH THE SOCIAL CHRISTIANS TOWARD THE CENTER ON ECONOMIC ISSUES, OTHERWISE THOSE SOCIAL CHRISTIANS WHO ARE OP-
POSED TO STATE INTERVENTION MIGHT SUPPORT THE FLEMISH LIBERAL PARTY, WHICH HAS AGAIN DEMONSTRATED ITS VITALITY. IN FORMING A NEW CABINET, IT WILL NOT BE POSSIBLE TO IGNORE THE FACT THAT FLEMISH SOCIALIST WERE NOT HELPED BY THEIR ACCEPTANCE OF TRADE UNION DIRECTIVES (AN ILLUSION TO FGTB PARTICIPATION IN DEVELOPING THE NEW SOCIALIST PROGRAM) OR BY THE PUBLIC REACTION TO MISUSE
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OF TRADE UNION POWER IN ECONOMIC LIFE AND ADMINISTRATION.

4. CHARLES REBUFFAT, EDITOR OF INDEPENDENT BUT FDF-LEANING "LE SOIR", SAW NO WEAKENING OF REGIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN BELGIUM IN THE ELECTION RESULTS. HE CITED BOTH THE ADROIT MODERNIZATION OF THE STANDS OF THE TRADITIONAL PARTIES ON REGIONALIZATION AND THE STRONGER POSITION OF THE FLEMISH VOLKSUNIE PARTY IN AND AROUND BRUSSELS AS EVIDENCE. HE SAW OTHER NATIONAL

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ISSUES, EXCEPT POSSIBLY ABORTION AND THE SCHOOL PROBLEMS, AS
HAVING PLAYED NO IMPORTANT ROLE IN THE ELECTION RESULTS,
WHICH WERE INFLUENCED PRIMARILY BY LOCAL ISSUES AND BY THE IMPACT
OF PERSONALITIES. THE UPWARD TREND OF THE LINGUISTIC PARTIES WAS
BLOCKED. HOWEVER, THEIR PREVIOUS GAINS WERE TREMENDOUS IN VIEW
OF THE TRADITIONAL STABILITY OF THE BELGIAN ELECTORATE. THE
DECLINE COULD THEREFORE ONLY BE A BREATHING SPELL. THE TRADITIONAL
PARTIES HAVE A NEW CHANCE BUT IF THEY GOVERN AS THEY DID BEFORE,

THEY WILL BE PUSHED BACK AGAIN.

5. JACQUES GUYAUX, EDITOR OF SOCIALIST "LE JOURNAL-INDEPENDENCE"
OF CHARLEROI, SAID THE SOCIALISTS AND SOCIAL CHRISTIANS HAD
EMERGED VICTORS FROM THEIR LONG COMBAT WITH THE DEMAGOGUES BUT
THE VICTORY DID NOT SUFFICE TO PREPARE FOR THEM A COMMON DESTINY.
THE SOCIALIST PARTY, WHICH HAS TAKEN A "TURN TO THE LEFT," HAD
BENEFITTED FROM THAT MOVE. UNDER NO PRETEXT OR PRESSURE SHOULD
IT RISK THIS BENEFIT BY PARTICIPATING IN ANY NEW GOVERNMENT THAT
WOULD REQUIRE SOCIALISTS TO "DENY THEMSELVES".

6. SOCIALIST PARTY CO-PRESIDENT VAN EYNDE, EDITOR OF
"VOLKSGAZET" IN ANTWERP, WROTE THAT THE SOCIAL CHRISTIANS SHOULD
NOT BE TRIUMPHANT IN THEIR VICTORY. THEY HAD NOT REGAINED THEIR
PREVIOUS POST-WAR HIGHS OR REGAINED MAJORITIES IN SOME PROVINCIAL
COUNCILS.
LOSSES BY LINGUISTIC PARTIES MAKE THOSE PARTIES OF DOUBTFUL VALUE
IN ANY COALITION. AS FOR THE SOCIALISTS, PARTICIPATION IN
GOVERNMENT REMAINED A MEANS, NOT A GOAL. THESE WHO PROMISED
TO CHANGE SO MUCH (APPARENTLY REFERRING TO ELEMENTS OF THE
TRADITIONAL PARTIES MORE FEDERALIST THAN THE FLEMISH SOCIALISTS)

MUST GO TO WORK. THE SOCIALIST WOULD NOT BE EAGER TO JOIN THEM
BY MAKING COMPROMISES.
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7. PIET VAN BRABANT, EDITOR OF LIBERAL " HET LAATSTE NIEUWS"
IN BRUSSELS, WROTE THAT THE ELECTION RESULTS HSOW DISAPPROVAL OF
RADICALISM, WHETHER LINGUISTIC, SOCIAL OR ECONOMIC ONLY THE

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